



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE
NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH
BETHESDA, MARYLAND 20014

Room 9N-119, Bldg. 10

June 21, 1973

To all participants in the 1973 Gordon Conference on Nucleic Acids:

Those who attended Friday morning's session will know what the attached letter is all about. For those who were not present Friday morning, the following remarks, which I made then, will explain the issue.

"First I will describe briefly the question that has been raised by some participants in the Conference, as I see it. We all share the excitement and enthusiasm of yesterday morning's speaker who pointed out that the scientific developments reported then would permit interesting experiments involving the linking together of a variety of DNA molecules. The cause of the excitement and enthusiasm is two-fold. First, there is our fascination with an evolving understanding of these amazing molecules and their biological action and second, there is the idea that such manipulations may lead to useful tools for alleviation of human health problems. Nevertheless, we are all aware that such experiments raise moral and ethical issues because of the potential hazards such molecules may engender. In fact, potential hazards exist in some of the viruses many of us are already studying. Other problems will arise with hybrid molecules we are contemplating. Furthermore, these hazards present problems to ourselves during our work and are potentially hazardous to the public.

Because we are doing these experiments, and because we recognize the potential difficulties, we have a responsibility to concern ourselves with the safety of our coworkers and laboratory personnel as well as with the safety of the public. We are asked this morning to consider this responsibility.

I fully understand that I have not discussed this topic exhaustively, and that there are even arguments to be made about the factual content of my statement. However, having the problem raised so late in the meeting requires that we deal expeditiously with this question. As Chairman, I will not permit substantive discussion of the problem but only proposals concerning possible action or inaction on the issue. In fifteen minutes the discussion will be closed and we will vote by a show of hands on any proposals that have been made and seconded. We will then proceed with the full scientific program planned for this morning."

The group voted by a majority of 78 out of about 95 in attendance (142 were enrolled at the Conference) to send a letter, from the Conference, to the Presidents of the National Academies of Science and Medicine. The remainder voted either for a similar letter but with individuals signing

if they so chose, or individual action. In addition, a majority of those in attendance voted to try and publicize the letter in SCIENCE magazine. Because many participants had left by Friday, it was decided to send out a draft of the letter to everyone. It is enclosed. Please send any suggestions for revisions to me by July 15. Also, please indicate below your approval or disapproval and mail to me by the same date. I will assume that anyone remaining silent agrees with the majority and has no serious objection to the draft of the letter.

Of course, these problems are not peculiar to the United States. Those of you who are abroad may wish to send our letter, or a similar one, to appropriate organizations in your own country.

Sincerely yours,

Maxine Singer

Maxine Singer

Encl.
MS:peg

	Approve	Disapprove
1) Send letter to Academy Presidents	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2) Publicize letter in SCIENCE Magazine	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>